RCEP TARGETS YEAR-END DEAL: Trade Ministers from the ASEAN + 6 economies met in Tokyo on Sunday and agreed to a greater focus toward finding the breakthroughs necessary for a conclusion of negotiations. To this end, they tasked negotiators to work on a package of year-end outcomes. A communique suggested they would seek a deal allowing economies of different development stages to actively benefit.

AUSTRALIA LOOKS TO BROADENING CHINA FTA: Trade Minister Ciobo said this week Australia was poised to build on the success of its FTA with China by broadening the deal. Australia and China had committed to a general review of the FTA by the end of the year. They were also committed to five-yearly reviews.

NEW ZEALAND MOVES ON TPP-11: Legislation to ratify the TPP-11 was introduced to the New Zealand Parliament last week. This came as Mexico became the first member to formally advise it had ratified the mega trade deal and Japan completed its legislative processes.

EU NEGOTIATORS PREPARE FOR BUSY FORTNIGHT: Trade negotiators from the EU face a busy fortnight in Brussels. They are this week starting the first negotiating round for an FTA with Australia and will next week hold a fifth round of FTA negotiations with Indonesia.

AUSTRALIA & INDIA QUIET ON FTA: A resumption of formal FTA talks does not appear imminent. After meeting in Canberra, Commerce Minister Prabhu simply said he and Trade Minister Ciobo had discussed market access issues, acknowledged progress and agreed to continue working on outstanding issues.

CANADA RESPONDS TO US TARIFFS: Canada has responded to US steel and aluminium tariffs with its own tax hike on US steel and aluminium goods. In addition, it has applied the tax hike to a wide-range of US consumer and food goods including jam, mayonnaise, ketch-up, toilet paper and whiskies.

GLOBAL AUTOMAKERS TAKE SWIPE AT TRUMP: Automakers have hit out at President Trump’s investigation of the national security implications of car imports. The Association of Global Automakers has told the Commerce Department: “America does not go to war in a Ford Fiesta,”

AUSTRALIA SCORES TOBACCO WIN: Australia’s plain packaging laws for tobacco got a boost last week when the WTO found against complaints by Honduras, Indonesia, Dominican Republic and Cuba that the laws broke trade rules. Trade Minister Ciobo said the ruling was a significant win for the country.

EU & VIETNAM FINALIZE TRADE NEGOTIATIONS: EU Trade Commissioner and Vietnamese Trade Minister Tran met in Brussels last week to finalize the texts of FTA and investment agreements. The agreement came nearly three years after negotiators agreed in principle on comprehensive deals.

AUSTRALIA MOVES TOWARD DEAL: Australia has moved closer to joining the WTO government procurement agreement. It is expected the 47 members will agree to Australia’s accession by year-end.